

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF THE SPOT-WINGED FALCONET (*SPIZIAPTERYX CIRCUMCINCTUS*)

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The following observations were made in Chulume, Rio Tercero, Province of Cordoba, Argentina (32°20' S, 64°50' W). The region is one of low hills, with native trees, dominated by *Acacia caven*, *Celtis tala*, *Geoffroea decorticans*, *Lithraea molleoides*. Average vegetation height is 4 m. The area is typical of half-open southern chaco forest.

Spizapteryx circumcinctus is a little known species in a monotypic genus found in the chaco region of central-northern Argentina and extends slightly into the chaco of Paraguay (Olog 1959). The first known nest and eggs were presumably found as recently as 1947. The falconets were using an old stick nest of an ovenbird (Furnariidae) (Dean 1971). Its relationship to other members of Falconidae is not clearly understood and while Brown and Amadon (1968) consider it to be related to the Pinyon Falcon (*Polihierax sp.*) of Africa and south-western Asia, recent anatomical studies show that it is not related to *Polihierax* but rather the "aberrant Neotropical falcons," especially the caracaras (Olson 1976) (See Figure 1).



Figure 1.—Spot-winged Falconet in northern Argentina. Note this species' similarity to the Pygmy Falcon, with regards to its posture, short wings and long tail.

On 20 August 1980 we were recording Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) calls in front of a solitary nest near a colony of about 20 nests located close to a more densely wooded area. We chose this nest in order to record single voices of *M. monachus* and then to evaluate their relationship with parakeet behaviour. At 18:10 hrs, while the sun was setting behind the hills, a pair of *Spizapteryx* arrived and began making vocal displays which we recorded for half an hour using play-backs. The male came toward us, repeated its vocal display and flew toward the nesting colony of *M. monachus*. When we approached the colony, doing play-backs of his voice, he started emitting alarm calls. Despite the fact that it was getting dark, we could see him clearly emerging from a parakeet nest continuously emitting alarm calls. Simultaneously we could also hear the alarm calls of the parakeets. After perching for a few minutes about 10 m. from us the falconet flew towards another parakeet nest and entered it. To our great surprise, 4 parakeets left this nest, flew around it emitting alarm calls only to re-enter it a few minutes later. In the same nest were now the falconet and 4 parakeets together.

We repeated the play-back of the falconet's voice and the same procedure occurred again, namely, the male falconet left the nest, emitting a few high pitched alarm calls, perched only 6 m. from us, and then entered a third parakeet nest, out of which flew 6 parakeets, circled excitedly around the nest and entered it later with the falconet still inside.

We did not use the play-back again and all birds remained where they were. It was obvious that the falconet was to spend the night in a nest together with the 6 parakeets. It is worthwhile to note that due to the play-back work to which we submitted this individual we were able to make him leave and enter three different nests, all of them inhabited by parakeets. This episode lasted about 45 min. We left the area at about 18:55. The female falconet was nowhere to be seen, and presumably left the area while we concentrated on our work with the male.

We feel that this behavior of *S. circumcinctus* deserves more studies and detailed data, but we also believe that our observation of this particular individual should not be considered rare. On another occasion, while Straneck was recording voices of *M. monachus* in exactly the same place, he saw another falconet flying towards the colony. As long as the falconet was flying, the parakeets in the colony were excited, emitting alarm calls. However, as soon as the falconet perched on a tree in the middle of the colony, the parakeets quieted down and normal activity resumed. Only when he took wing, and showed the typical raptor silhouette did the colony become excited again.

The behavior of this falconet around bulky stick nests with hole-type entrances is of particular interest in light of the fact that the African Pigmy Falcon (*P. semitorquatus*) nests and roosts in the nests of weaver finches (Ploceidae) (Maclean 1970). Weaver finch nests that are particularly used by the falcons are those of the Sociable Weaver (*Philetarius socius*) and have the general configuration of a large Monk Parakeet colonial nest. While these two falcons may not be particularly related they may prove to have shown a similar evolution of behavioral traits perhaps in response to the environment.

For this work we used a Uher 4000 report IC recorder and Dan Gibson P 200 parabolic microphone with BASF DP 26 tapes. All recordings are in the possession of Straneck.

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A POSSIBLE HUNTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO RAPTOR SPECIES

by

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The high plains of eastern New Mexico provide a wintering area for numerous raptors, including the abundant Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) and the less abundant but conspicuous Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*). While studying the Lesser Prairie Chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) in Roosevelt and Lea Counties, New Mexico, a possible relationship between these 2 raptor species was noted.